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State of the real

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State of the real

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Master Thesis

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The work I have developed during my master studies revolves around the working title, “the media in our media.” How the elements of the media are presented and integrated in every aspect of our life, dictating our way of thinking and the way we build our society. My research in general is based on theoretical viewpoints that in the end would support and lead to an artistic approach, which involves in my works the same elements used by “the media” (e.g., printed matters, television, internet, etc) as a technique of evidencing the circular mechanisms but misses an element of “our media.”

This text and my recent work have not been made to resolve such omission—and not with an underlying statement about it—but rather the construction of them, through a collection of anecdotes, made me aware of the missing element. The anecdotes presented here, along with the artistic and theoretical investigations, explore the media, its mechanisms of production of information and the methods that allow its continuity in time through circuits of information, building the vicious cycles that sustain our construction of the reality. Finally, this text aims to sabotage the thoughts we may have or not about media, using a little failure in the system given by the real, called “the recess.”



On the third day of training, to know if I could be employed to work in a tailor shop, the person who was training me, decided to turn on the tv. Oriental music filled the room. Looking at the screen, a belly dancer moved to the music. While I stitched, unstitched and stitched again, from time to time, I glanced at the screen. Without many apparent changes, the belly dancer danced the belly dance. Many people visited the tailor shop during those hours, mostly men, who didn't pay much attention to the video. But when a woman entered the tailor shop, I saw something in the way she looked at me, concern in her eyes. I realized what the indifference of some looks like compared to the concern of others.

What I perceived in the lady's eyes—and this is a very important word—was a mediated reaction. All her social and cultural background, as a woman, was telling her that she should respond to what she was watching and that she should feel something about that video. But at the same time, the same cultural background was telling her that probably it was not a good idea to comment on the video in a tailor shop of immigrants.

When I finished the day of training, I asked for a copy of the DVD and left the tailor shop knowing that the job was not going to be mine.



Thinking about a new project, I searched the name of the belly dancer on the internet and found a lot of information about her. Mostly, what caught my attention were the YouTube videos of her presentations on various talk shows. The DVD content, unknown at that time to me, has become, in some place else, something of massive proportions because of the media and the interest of certain people in reproducing that content. After watching these videos several times, I realized that one of the show hosts was a man who turned out to appear also in the production of the DVD of the belly dancer.

The intricate relation among the elements that integrate media, including the efforts carried out by the mysterious man, transforms the talk-show format, so popular nowadays, into something that has the power to legitimize, and in this specific case of the belly dancer, transforms her into something popular as well, allowing as a result the sale of a product of which the original purpose is to be massive: the DVD. Through the media, the belly dancer has become part of the reality of the people working at the tailor shop as well as of my reality and the reality of the lady who visited the tailor shop that day.



Bearing in mind the processes in which media operate and the reaction of the lady that day in the tailor shop, I started to think about vicious cycles and information circuits—and their role as manufactures of our reality. I mentioned before that what the lady experienced in the tailor shop was a mediated reaction against a specific situation she was facing alongside the cultural background she has acquired during her life. Depending on the cultural background each person has received, the reactions towards every aspect of life are going to be triggered in a way each person has been taught to react over and over again. These repetitions of instructions, that conform our cultural background, establish vicious cycles that tend to be repeated in time, as well.

The information circuits have to do with how these instructions, as pieces of information, are sent, how they return to complete the circuit and also with how these pieces of information are chosen and put together, creating certain information circuits and not

others, or certain realities and not others—like the DVD of the belly dancer in the tailor shop. Finally, the information circuits set, little by little, circuit by circuit, each aspect of the way we live and think; information circuits are the small pieces that conform our cultural background.



Pierre Bourdieu's text, "On Television," is a good example about information circuits. The text was originally a televised conference, which was transcribed and turned into a book for distribution. Despite the fact that it was originally broadcasted through television, it was not diffused the same way, because television companies did not want anyone talking perpetually, once a week in a pre-recorded program, about some questionable things about television.

Bourdieu speaks about how television works and affects our way of living in this society, implying the power of television in the creation of new structures since its invention. When the author makes this analysis and writes about it, he is creating the reality that is spoken by the text; when I read the text, I confirm him as the creator of this reality, because the text is telling me how I should see television from a critical standpoint. This makes my opinion already mediated through the author's words; whether I agree or not, my opinion becomes part of the reality, from which the author's thoughts have originated. Completing the circuit, the author's thoughts have been elaborated from the reality he has perceived, which also has been created for and by others even before the chance of his construction of a different reality to the whole television structure. This means that he is inserted in one process of repetition before he starts another one. His opinions are, *per se*, interfered from the beginning.

It is possible to put Bourdieu's text, the dancer, the DVD and the talk show together to present a bigger circuit of information, or to take them one by one and examine different relationships and mediations that each one of them could have, as I have done with Pierre Bourdieu's text. Also, spectra of new circuits can be created if each one of them—the text, the dancer, the DVD and the talk show—is put together with elements outside this scenario. What creates the reality we inhabit, both physical and intellectual, are the decisions on what elements are to be used, the ways of arranging them, the meanings given to each element

and the ways we learn to understand each element through texts, images and speech. We choose an element, we enhance it, and we create our reality.



But, what happens if the reality doesn't work for everyone—how to change, for example, a world made out of a patriarchal structure conformed by the circuits of information, of elements and every act we do. We have assimilated up to the point like if it was part of our own DNA. It seems that the more you try the more you fail. The cycles which compose our reality are, in the end cycles and the further you are getting from the starting point the closer you are getting to the start again. Contrasting both Norwegian and Colombian societies, different points in the cycle are evident; the latter is 'half way' from the 'starting point'; raising awareness, creating laws, 'following previous steps'. The former is getting closer to what can be thought as the ideal situation of equality, just to fall back again at the 'starting point', where things are so presumably well that the efforts settle and people tend to hide what it is wrong in an effort to keep the status of a developed society that has been acquired during the previous stages in the cycle.

Last semester, I was going through a lot of situations that produced a kind of depressive state for me. At some point in this 'trying to understand how the world works', the conclusion, that the world is set, established and impossible of changing came to my mind. The equality we were studying in a class is something not possible of achieving in this world we have built and where we live our reality. So, I asked myself again, how to change the reality. I came with a second conclusion: a lobotomy. We will need a lobotomy, not for curing craziness, just for preventing us to think the way we think, and soon after, we will have to leave the planet, using only one pilot who would transport the lobotomized people there and go back leaving no trace of our actual reality. That action would probably give us a hundred years before everything would start again, or not, who knows.



Here is where my depression of last semester was talking through me. This was the state of my thoughts those days. At that period of time, we were reading in a class Paulo Freire's book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". In this book he talks about how the oppressed have to emancipate themselves from the oppressed situation, both individually and then as a group,

and how it is impossible to receive this freedom from the oppressors, that does not mean the oppressors must sit idly. Freire explains that the worst situation for an oppressed is to realize about the conditions of oppression and keep him or herself trapped in it by negative thoughts, preventing them from seeking freedom individually and as a collective.

These negative thoughts are a reaction from the oppressed against the reality that is living, and that brings along a state of depression. I identified myself in this state of depression with the experiences of the oppressed according to Paulo Freire. But, I don't consider this as the worst scenario for the oppressed. Once one can reach this state, one can realize about the situation that in fact is living. Both the oppressed and the oppressor, in order to realize about the situation, must live within this darkness for a while. When you reach this point you have awareness of the situation, if you don't reach that place you are untouched, you still have no clue about what you are fighting for or what you are giving up.

I am still in this dark period hoping a lot people are in it as well.



Trinh T. Minh-ha was in this 'dark' place when in an interview she says that she finds herself closer to fiction. This sentence, "finds oneself closer to fiction", instantly, compels me to think about the impossibility of inhabiting a world with equality and the impossibility of changing the established structures. Maybe she was also implying that we have to move out somewhere else. And this somewhere else, instead of requiring a lobotomy and a new planet, as I proposed, could be the fictional world for her. What I felt in her words was the need to find another stand point, another place or, better, another state.

After a quick search of the meaning of the word 'Fiction', two new words came across, Reality and Real. Acknowledging the different meaning of these words and based on Jacques Lacan's viewpoint and theories, though I have not dug deep into them, I will use these words, as borrowed, to make a little bit of sense of the things that we have built and established to be lived in. That forms the reality. And from the things we have around us but are not considered suitable to be lived in. That forms the real.



If reality is what we live, everything we know and everything we can enable through text, images and speech, then the lobotomy and the fiction solutions are not indeed such. Those

spaces would be a kind of simulation of reality because they would be still mediated and completely linked with the reality. Therefore, the only space left, not reached by this reality, will be the space where the real takes place.

The real is something indefinable, unspeakable and it cannot even be reached through the imagination, although we may think we are doing it, it would be probably part of the reality and not the real. Since the reality names, symbolizes, represents and categorizes; the real does not find a place to exist in the world of the reality. The real is unattainable for the conscious of men, which makes it a really good prospect where equality or the absence of patriarchal structure (without having to be named as such, since they do not exist, so you cannot even name them or be aware of them), can be possible or not possible. You do not have to choose words in the state of real.

So, if reality is already mediated, structured, symbolized, defined and designed, one thing left to do, in the seeking of an answer about how to change our reality, could be to route to the real and not inhabit, not structure, not symbolize, not represent, and so on. But then, if we decide to take the route of the real, what can we expect in that path.



Death, Dementia and Recess are some of the things we can expect.

Lacan mentions death as one of the states of the real. Since, nobody can write about it and we cannot classify it in structures inside the space of the reality. We die as an action and we can talk about how this happens, but we cannot talk about the element itself. We cannot say what happens after the body dies and the state of death that follows. This impossibility of addressing death, using speech, is one of the most important things that separates death from the reality and places it in the real.

Dementia can also be considered as one state of the real. Literally it means without mind. A person who suffers from dementia loses the ability of their brain little by little. Among many things, it affects language, social skills, cognitive ability and memory. All the previous knowledge they have received and accumulated loses its meaning, what includes all the areas that belong to the reality, but not those that belongs to the real. And in this real state even the word 'knowledge' has lost its meaning. There are no structures either.

Though this is basically what we know from outside, because we are not allowed to reach any further point to that state of dementia and continuing thinking from the point of view of the reality.



The other one is Recess. This happens a lot with my mother when she is eating. One day we were having a coffee and she, as usual, left the place. Not physically, she was in front of me, but I was alone and so was she. I called her twice: 'ma, ma' and finally she came back saying, 'why don't you let me rest', almost angry.

As I said, it happens a lot with her, but I remember this time especially because she said she was resting, there in the middle of a crowded place, sitting on a chair with her eyes open. But she was resting in fact. I believe every person has experienced what my mother experiences so often, the Recess. A few seconds where you get lost; you do not remember what you were thinking, because, maybe, you were not thinking. Perhaps, it is this disconnection with the reality what makes my mother feel so rested after only a few seconds.

Where we go when that happens, when it starts, what occurs during those seconds, can someone explain that, can someone recall that experience, and where does this feeling of resting come from? All these questions, for which I have no answer, make me believe that the Recess is a state of the real as well.



Coming back to the path of the real, if what we find in this space is death, dementia and recess the perspective of following it, for an oppressed-depressed person, is kind of tempting but limited. The pursuit of recess might be the most promising one because we can get in and out of it, though it is also unlikely for the reason that it does not last long.

But what if a circuit of information around recess is created and prolonged in time, turning it into part of our cultural background? Could the mix of reality and real lead to a circuit of information that enhances small but different reactions from the ones we previously know? Would this new circuit of information be part of vicious cycles we already have or would this be part of a new one? Though, is it possible to create new vicious cycles?

My current project is dealing with these questions. The idea is to represent one state of the real, in this case the recess, using media elements. This would allow the public that gets in touch with this representation to enter in a circuit of information that associates the representation of the real with a state free of patriarchal structures. Maybe leading the public to react in a different way, both when they are experiencing the recess or someone nearby them is doing it. So, instead of waking people up, as I do with my mother when she is recessing, we could think about the recess according to the meaning given to it –the recess as a state free of patriarchal structures– and when we get out of this state we could relate it with the same meaning as well.



We can think about this proposal of mixing components of the reality and the real as a different circuit of information. Even if it is using the same elements of the reality to enlarge our cultural background, at the same time it is using the real to provoke a little twist on it. Thanks to the part belonging to the reality the repetition of the circuit is assured, allowing the other part belonging to the real as a small and momentary failure in the components of patriarchal structures; a kind of mockery of the system performed by all kinds of persons.

If so, this failure would have the chance of being reproduced using the meaning that was given to it by the reality. If this circuit of information is repeated as much as needed to become part of the cultural background of people, maybe it could change preset information, and if there is a change, it would affect our reactions. Thinking about the lady that day in the tailor shop, I wonder, if she had had this new circuit of information in her system before, would her reaction have been the same, would there have been a reaction at all? And would my perception of her reaction have been different as well?

It could also be worth to try letting our thoughts go further. Thinking about the possibility of creating new vicious cycles, or better the possibility of avoiding the creation of new ones, would a DVD with a belly dancer be possible in this scenario? Or would there have been such a thing called media?

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